

# **TAFE Flexi-Program for Animal Control Officer Training**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first course in animal control officer practices was offered at Ithaca College of TAFE (Brisbane, Qld) in 1985 as a direct result of the 1983 Urban Animal Symposium. Unfortunately councils located outside the Brisbane area were unable to access the program. In response to requests from these councils a program was developed which would provide animal control officers throughout the State with access to this training. This paper provides a brief rundown on the first Animal Control Officer Practices Flexi-Program which was conducted in North Queensland.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The first course in Animal Control Officer Practices was offered at Ithaca College of TAFE in 1985. This was the first of its kind in Australia and was a direct result of the 1983 Urban Animal Symposium. The course was designed to provide training to dog impounders, animal ordinance officers and pound and animal refuge workers employed in the Brisbane and near Brisbane area.

Participants in the program have come from a number of councils including:

- Brisbane City Council
- Pine Rivers Shire Council
- Redcliffe City Council
- Albert Shire Council
- Logan Shire Council
- Moreton Shire Council
- Gold Coast City Council and
- Ipswich City Council.

The program has proven to be highly successful with considerable positive feedback from participants and councils. It was envisaged that after two or three intakes the course would probably only be offered once every two or three years. However demand has not decreased and each year there is a new intake of participants for an ever widening group of local authorities.

It also became evident that councils in more remote areas of Queensland were interested in the program being made available for their officers. Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns City Councils provided the impetus for a Flexi-Program in Animal Control Officers Practices to be offered in North Queensland earlier this year. Once again this offering was an Australian first.

It was envisaged that about 14 students would enrol in the program; however support from the North Queensland Councils was extensive with some 28 enrolments. Other areas of the State also showed strong interest and it is hoped that the offering will be extended to provide access for these councils as well.

## **THE FLEXI-PROGRAM APPROACH**

Flexi-Program is a combination of on and off campus study. This type of delivery has already been successful in meeting the needs of veterinary nurses throughout the state.

Participants in the Animal Control Officer Program were provided with lecture notes and workshop material covering a variety of topics including:

- public relations
  - communication
  - confrontation
  - dealing with difficult situations
- animal identification
- animal behaviour
  - signs of aggression
  - fear biters
- kennel design and maintenance
  - hygiene
  - nutrition
  - water requirements
- common internal and external parasites
- signs of ill health
  - infectious diseases
  - vaccination program
- report and records
  - legal requirements
  - local by-laws

Students were also required to complete assignment work linked to this material.

A three-day workshop formed an integral component of the program and was designed to provide students with the opportunity to:

- attend practical sessions
- attend tutorial sessions and
- complete assessment for the program.

## **PRESENTATION OF MATERIALS**

As there were no specific texts for this area of training, a range of lecture materials were developed.

One of the problems encountered with the Brisbane groups was that there was a wide variation of school levels and age groups with many of the participants having been out of a formal learning environment for some time. Therefore presenting written materials for home study to a group whose background and ages was unknown presented certain difficulties. It was essential that the content of the lectures be clearly presented and readily understood without being oversimplified to such an extent as to insult the capabilities and expertise of the participants.

At the end of each lecture revision questions were supplied to give students an indication of their understanding of the material.

## **WORKSHOP**

The workshop was conducted in Townsville utilising the facilities of the Townsville City Council and the SPCA. The support of these organizations was greatly appreciated.

Students were enthusiastic in their approach to the workshop sessions. The session on dealing with confrontation provided some very colourful discussion. Participants were keen to develop further skills in this area and share experiences and strategies used in dealing with a variety of situations. It was interesting to observe the group as they discussed the various stressful aspects of their work and to see the developing support within the group. Remember that many of the individuals work in areas where they are isolated not only within the workplace but also socially.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Students completed two examination papers during the workshop which covered the lecture materials and aspects of the workshop. Assignment results were incorporated into the final results.

Students were also assessed on their participation in the workshop activities which included role play sessions, reports and interviewing techniques. Of the 28 enrolments 24 students successfully completed the program.

## **EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM**

A survey of the participants was conducted to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the program. At the time of writing this paper the results of the survey were not available however these results will be presented at the conference. Other feedback has indicated that the program was successful with requests for further programs being received.

## **CONCLUSION**

The first Flexi-Program in Animal Control Officers Practices has been received with enthusiasm. As with any new program there are aspects of the program which can be improved however feedback thus far from both participants and councils has been positive.

It is appropriate that this paper should conclude with a written comment from one of the students:

*"After attending the seminar and relaxing with my non-judgemental associates, I know one thing for sure ... Animal Control Officer must be a position resulting in great character-building, as the people I met were an exceptional, understanding, fun-loving and, yes, animal loving group, with whom I felt totally accepted and respected for our experiences in common. Here's to better days of more public awareness and responsibility to their much loved pets, thus preventing accidents and spread of disease, providing controlled animal population and a cleaner and healthier environment for us all to share."*

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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My first involvement in urban animal management was through the National Urban Animal Integration Symposium convened by the Australian Veterinary Association in 1983. I presented a paper on a proposed course in animal control officer training. As a result of the Symposium, the program is now offered through Ithaca College of TAFE. My interest in urban animal management has continued to grow. I have learned about the difficulties and stress ACOs meet implementing the by-laws designed in the interests of public and animal welfare.

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